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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000475

SIPDIS

SIPDIS, SENSITIVE

LONDON FOR ARAB MEDIA UNIT

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TAGS: [EPET](#) [EFIN](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [KCOR](#) [KPAO](#) [OPRC](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: GOI, EMBASSY AND DFID EXPECTING BIDS FOR
TV AND RADIO ADS, MINISTRIES STILL REFINING "THE
MESSAGE"

¶1. (SBU) On February 12, Embassy ECON and PAS, together with the Iraqi Government Communications Directorate (GCD) and the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), met with two Iraqi production companies to present our request for proposals for TV and radio ads. All said they had the technical capacity to do the job, even while admitting that the message was a tough one for a government that had credibility problems with most citizens. The companies were told to provide their best quotes by February 18, along with samples of previous work.

¶2. (SBU) On February 13, representatives from Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA), Ministry of Finance, GCD, Embassy, USAID, International Republican Institute (IRI) and (DFID) met again to refine the public messages, making progress that included drafting possible scenarios for the ads (including proposed audio and video components). At present, we have four "approved" scenarios (approved by the public relations gurus), and out of ten total crafted by Embassy ECON and PAS based on messages provided by the Iraqis. Messages tended to focus on fighting smuggling, targeting support to aid Iraq's poorest, diverting subsidies to public investment, and sacrificing now for future generations. We re-circulated the "scenarios" by email as a package to the public affairs group on February 14. The public affairs experts agreed in the meeting to present the package to Directors and Ministers. Separately, EconOff made clear to the Deputy Minister of Finance, and DFID and Embassy PAS have made clear to GCD, that progress must proceed apace if the Iraqi government hopes to retain U.S. funding for the campaign.

¶3. (SBU) Even absent approval of the policy experts at each ministry, Embassy plans to provide the "scenarios" to IRI on February 14 or 15 to test with focus groups.

¶4. (SBU) Since our first meeting with GOI officials to discuss the campaign, the process has been buffeted by media reports, government infighting, and now rumor. In late January, Sharqiya TV reported that fuel prices might go up "ten-fold"; in the February 13 meeting, some officials noted that Iraqis now believed they would ultimately have to pay 1500 dinars per liter, rather than the current import price (750 dinars). Also, public education has been affected by news reports February 11 that the General Director of the Oil Products Distribution Company said that LPG shortages resulted from the failure of the Ministry of Finance to settle import accounts with Turkey, Iran, and the Gulf States. We saw immediate fallout from this comment when Radio Nawa hosted a call-in show for an hour on February 12, which PAS monitored. Callers' views follow:

- Government negligence and administrative corruption is the problem.

- The Iraqi Prime Minister and the Oil Ministry are behind this crisis.
- There is administrative corruption in the Oil Ministry.
- Basra is the scene of much fuel smuggling.
- The cabinet is corrupt.
- We must control militias which belong to some government members and are smuggling oil products.
- If we cooperate with security officials, we might stop fuel smuggling.
- The Iraqi government is creating this crisis on purpose to divert us from other issues (delays in government formation).
- Private fuel stations smuggle fuel abroad with help of members of Iraqi government.

15. (SBU) When Embassy PAS shared these observations with one GCD official at the meeting, he shrugged and said the government is much weaker than Iraqi political parties and there was no bureaucratic or institutional mechanism to address the problem. Bureaucrats were not the ones, he implied, who could close the gap and restore government credibility.

16. (SBU) In another example, the GCD Director, a political appointee of Ja'aferi's, has absented himself from three key meetings, even as we are trying to "empower" his institution to coordinate messages for the whole government. His deputy -- who has had to step into the void -- is smart but obsequious and terrified of command. Other obviously Ba'ath era traits impede progress. The deputy stated that he was unable to engage PAS officer in a "pre-brief," he said, because all comments must be recorded, and because it was inconceivable for anyone to talk before the session had been formally "opened."

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17. (SBU) In the February 13 meeting, participants proposed reviewing individually 29 separate proposals, and seemed shocked when urged to just toss out their favorites for general dissection by others, which they finally did. The IRI director, who has been in Iraq for over a year, and the DFID advisor, both saw Embassy frustrations with slow progress. They praised us for attempting to give the Iraqis ownership of this campaign, and encouraged our continued forbearance in this important capacity-building effort.

Comment

18. (SBU) Iraqis -- especially government employees -- even while accepting much disarray in their daily lives -- seem unable to tolerate a freestyle approach in meetings. It took quite some prompting by the non-Iraqi participants, but in the end, the bureaucrats bravely abandoned their formalistic approach. The process vividly underscores that we face major voids in human resource and institutional capacity. We also see that the current public affairs approach: carping among ministries or silence from the most senior officials, promotes neither public trust in the government nor the credibility of a future message. As we continue pushing the agenda with the Iraqis involved in formulating a message, the Embassy will urge Iraqi officials to keep their discussions and institutional rivalries private.

KHALILZAD